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# NATIONAL PROVERBS: *RUSSIA*



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**T**HE Proverbs of a Nation are not only an epitome of its wisdom, but crystallise for us much of its national temperament and popular habits of thought. Nowhere, perhaps, can what are regarded as the national traits be so compactly presented as in these saws and proverbs. In the preparation of the present series the utmost care has been taken to unearth those sayings which are in danger of falling into disuse, and are not widely known. The commonplace Proverbs have, in most cases, been rejected; little-known sources have been investigated, and everything possible done to give, in each case, the cream of the available material. The Editors will be very grateful to hear of any good but little-known Proverbs which readers may be able to add to the present collections.

## *National Proverbs*

**M**EN carry their superiority inside, animals outside.

That which is taken in with the milk, only goes out with the soul.

Samson was a strong man, yet could not pay money before he had it.

When money speaks, truth keeps silence.

## *Russia*

Beat your wife before dinner, and  
again before supper.

He has not known misfortune who  
has not married a young widow.

A mother's love will draw up from  
the depths of the sea.

He who throws even a splinter to  
cover a widow's house will be pro-  
tected by God.

When you baptize a Jew, keep him  
under water.



## *National Proverbs*

By birth a landlord, by deeds a Jew.

The Russian is clever, but always too late.

A Tartar is born a pig, therefore he does not eat pork.

The German may be a good fellow; but it is better to hang him.

One Jew is equal, in cheating, to two Greeks, one Greek to two Armenians.

## *Russia*

The kindness of the landlord is as fleeting as the dew.

Even in hell the peasant will have  
✓ to serve the landlord, for, while the latter is boiling in a cauldron the former will have to put wood under it.

Should a peasant become a landlord he will flay the peasants.

✓ To shave destroys the image of God.

✓ Trust not the landlord until he is in the coffin.

## *National Proverbs*

Our souls are God's, our bodies the  
Tsar's.

In the wood I met a bear, in my  
house the stepmother.

A Russian can be cheated only by  
a gipsy, a gipsy by a Jew, a Jew by  
a Greek, and a Greek by the devil.

Every tribe has its fever, every  
mountain its wolf.

The Tsar is not fire, but approach-  
ing him you will be singed.

## *Russia*

Time does not bow to you, you must bow to time.

✓ Man is caught by his tongue, and an ox by its horns.

A wife is not an instrument which can be hung against the wall when you have played on it.

A guest has not to thank the host, but the host the guest.

Every fox takes care of its tail.

## *National Proverbs*

If all fools wore white caps we should look like a flock of sheep.

In the next world usurers have to count red-hot coins with bare hands.

Trust in God, but mind your own business.

He is a fool who makes his physician his heir.

He runs from the bear to fall in with the wolves.

## *Russia*

You are born, baptized, married and buried, but for all you must pay the priest.

A woman's hair is long, but her sense is short.

When the priest goes visiting the devil gets into the parish.

A fool shoots, God guides the bullet.

Go before God with justice, before the judge with money.

## *National Proverbs*

To defend yourself against a thief,  
a stick; to defend yourself against a  
Tchinovnik (official), a rouble.

The spoken word cannot be swallowed.

Call a peasant "brother," he will  
demand to be called "father."

Measure thy cloth ten times, thou  
canst cut it but once.

The Tchinovniks have a good position  
in the next world, they are  
directly promoted to be devils.

## *Russia*

A gipsy once in his life tells the truth, and then he repents of so doing.

The Frenchman's legs are thin, his soul little, he is fickle as the wind.

If you be a cock, crow; if a hen, lay eggs.

A great guest is always dear to a host.

A man without a wife is like a man in winter without a fur bonnet.



## *National Proverbs*

A great head has great cares.

A bachelor is a goose *sans* water.

It is a nuisance to go alone, even to be drowned.

A word of kindness is better than a pie.

The greatest king must at last be put to bed with a shovel.

## *Russia*

A nobleman is always in the right  
when a peasant sues.

A crab is not a fish among fishes,  
a bat is not a bird among birds, a  
henpecked husband is not a man  
among men.

A husband is father of his wife.

Truth is straight, but judges are  
crooked.

When you go to law against the  
Emperor, God Himself should be  
the judge.

## *National Proverbs*

✓ The fall of a leaf is a whisper to the living.

We are not in Poland where the women are stronger than the men.

The soldier finds a place neither in Paradise nor hell; for Paradise he is too outrageous and in hell he would worry the devils with drinking.

He who fears a sparrow will never sow millet.

A father's blessing cannot be drowned in water, nor consumed by fire.

## *Russia*

The hop searches for a pole to rest on, and a young girl for a young man.

Where there are no fish even a crawfish calls himself a fish.

Knock out his eye who remembers by-gones.

Bury it as a stone in water, only bubbles at the top.

An old crow croaks not for nothing.

## *National Proverbs*

When God made the world he sent to the Poles some reason and the feet of a gnat, but even this little was taken away by a woman.

Napoleon was not scorched; but he left Moscow.

The wife, without beating the husband, rules him by her temper.

The Tchinovnik but takes up his pen, and the peasants pray and birds tremble.

A frightened Frenchman runs away from even a she-goat.

## *Russia*

When the ass bears a light load, he wants to lie down.

✓ Having a good wife and rich cabbage soup, other things seek not.

Better to beg than steal, but better to work than beg.

The burden is light on the shoulder of another.

A good conscience is God's eye.

## *National Proverbs*

Every fish is not a sturgeon.

A Pole tells lies even in his old age.

When the scabbards are broken we  
can no longer hide our sabres.

Pray to God, but keep rowing to  
the shore.

Drink at table, not behind a pillar.

## *Russia*

The wolf asked the goat to dinner,  
the goat respectfully declined.

A present is cheap but love is dear.

His thoughts are over the mountains,  
but death is over his shoulder.

Dogs bark and the wind carries it  
away.

With God go over the sea, without  
Him do not go over the threshold.



## *National Proverbs*

Seven never wait for one.

The future belongs to him who knows how to wait.

Better under the beard of the old than the whip of the young.

You look for the horse you ride on.

A christianized Jew and a reconciled foe are not to be trusted.

## *Russia*

It will last our time, if after us no  
grass grows, what does it matter to  
us?

Marry not a priest's daughter.

When you die your trumpeter shall  
be buried.

He who weeps from his heart shall  
provoke tears even from the blind.

A dog is wiser than a woman, he  
does not bark at his master.

## *National Proverbs*

When you die even your tomb shall be comfortable.

The monk has the beard of an apostle, but the moustache of a devil.

Fear not the law, but the judge.

If the thunder is not loud the peasant forgets to cross himself.

When the priest visits you, do not be over-joyed, he will soon begin to beg.

## *Russia*

A husband's cuffs leave no marks.

The open mouth never remains hungry.

✓ Make thyself a sheep, and the wolf is ready.

Honour is on his tongue, and ice under it.

He who steadies himself between two ships will certainly be drowned.

## *National Proverbs*

As long as the sun shines one does not ask for the moon.

Man doth what he can, and God what he will.

An untried friend is like an uncracked nut.

A wife is not a slipper or a glove or a saddle which you can remove when you like.

A fox sleeps but counts hens in his dreams.

## *Russia*

✓ Marriage is the tomb of love.

He will have enough to buy nuts  
with it.

✓ Let there only be money, and the  
flies will come in numbers.

The paper is patient and the pen is  
writing.

The pigs, too, have an annual holi-  
day.

## *National Proverbs*

Let there only be mud, and the devil will not fail.

They beat you—and do not even allow you to weep.

The dog sees the milk, but the snout is too short.

By appearance an eagle, but by intelligence a black-cock.

If you are afraid of the wolf don't go into the forest.

## *Russia*

The ravens do not tear each other's eyes out.

Every priest sings after his own style.

He is in the water up to the neck, and is clamouring for a drink.

If you have eaten the morsel on Wednesday, do not look for it on Thursday.

The wolf is no comrade to the horse.



## *National Proverbs*

In calm weather even a woman can steer.

In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed is king.

In our neighbours' hands the morsel always appears big.

Don't go into a strange monastery with your own laws.

Select your wife with your ears rather than with your eyes.

## *Russia*

Where God builds a church there  
the devil has his chapel.

Where you saw wood, the sawdust  
will fall.

If the servants are clad in silk, the  
masters are in debt.

•  
He is as stupid as a cork.

✓ An empty stomach has no ears.

## *National Proverbs*

You give nuts to the squirrel when it has lost its teeth.

Where there is *Kvass* there are also dregs.

One cannot die twice, and one death we cannot avoid.

God is too high and the Tsar too far away.

A good dog never barks at the weather.

## *Russia*

Where there is unhappiness there is  
no envy.

Debt and misery are neighbours.

God is the guardian of fools.

A native lamb is better than a foreign  
cow.

A little egg at Christmas is worth  
a great deal.

## *National Proverbs*

Spit in his eyes, and he will say it is the dew of heaven.

There is only one wicked woman in the world, but every man thinks she is his wife.

Fools never grow grey.

Marry your son when you wish, and your daughter when you can.

A woman laughs when she can, and cries when she wishes.

## *Russia*

When the head is stupid the feet suffer.

Never buy an unseen horse.

A bad woman in the house is worse than the devil in the wood.

There lies the dog.

You may escape a snake, but not a calumny.

## *National Proverbs*

He knows where the lobsters pass their winter.

The gambler is the pal of the thief.

If you go to war pray, if you go on a sea-journey pray twice, but pray three times when you are going to be married.

An *ikon* and a shovel may be made of the same wood.

If grandmother were not grandmother she would be grandfather.

## *Russia*

You may feed the wolf as much as you like, he will always glance towards the forest.

Too much butter will not spoil the broth.

The bell calls to church, but never goes there itself.

He who is destined for the gallows will not be drowned.

A *kopeck* drives the cart.



## *National Proverbs*

Even crooked wood burns straight.

If you are often on horseback, you may sometimes be under the horse.

The wolf catches, but is also caught.

It is better to turn back than lose one's way.

What the young one begs for, the grown-up throws away.

## *Russia*

When the mouse is not hungry, the flour tastes bitter.

A bad peace is better than a good quarrel.

One fisherman recognizes another from a distance.

The hen should not crow like the cock.

Between a woman's "yea" and her "nay" you cannot even squeeze a needle through.

## *National Proverbs*

An old man's young wife is neither girl, wife, nor widow.

He aimed at the raven and hit the cow.

There is a cover for every pot.

There is no reply to a stupid question.

For rotten goods, a blind buyer.

## *Russia*

You cannot hang everything on one nail.

If you are sitting on his cart, you must also sing his song.

An uninvited guest is worse than a Tartar.

All that is shaking does not fall.

All Cossacks do not become *Attamans* (Cossack chiefs).

## *National Proverbs*

Not all those who have long knives  
are cooks.

Mistrust the horse on the field and  
the wife in the house.

Buy not the house, buy the neigh-  
bour.

Do not spit into the well—you may  
have to drink out of it.

If you are not caught, you are no  
thief.

## *Russia*

If you have not broken the shell you cannot eat the kernel.

One cannot smell lemons with a swine's snout.

He resembles neither his mother nor father, but some young passer-by.

An ape in silk is always an ape.

One soldier does not make a regiment.

## *National Proverbs*

Only the eagle may look upon the sun.

They are berries of the same field.

He was born in a shirt.

If the father is a fisherman the children look into the water.

The squires are fighting, and the *moujiks* are suffering.

## *Russia*

Better the first quarrel than the last.

The first wife is from God, the second from man, the third from the devil.

It is bad when one lamb has seven shepherds.

Keep a thing seven years, and you will know what to do with it.

Hair by hair, you may pluck out the whole beard.



## *National Proverbs*

If you can't be a good servant, you will not be a good master.

It is too late to think of the wine when the cask is empty.

You may get used even to hell.

Wash a pig as much as you like, it will always go into the mud.

Drink a glass of wine after your soup, and you steal half-a-crown from the physician.

## *Russia*

If you are a priest, you must sing the mass.

He went for wool and came home shorn himself.

It fits like a saddle on a cow.

Mixed with dry wood even the wet will burn.

The seller can manage with one eye,  
the buyer requires a hundred.

## *National Proverbs*

Prayers and abuse are lost on him  
like peas thrown at the wall.

If the bird sings too early, beware  
of the cat.

Jealousy is the sister of love.

The mouth may be crooked, but  
the soul is straight.

Weapons, wives, and dogs should  
never be lent.

## *Russia*

An empty sack cannot stand up.

The drunkard may be in church,  
but people will always suppose him  
in the public-house.

A friend turned hostile is the worst  
enemy.

However much you may boil the  
*moujik*, he will always smell after  
cheese.

One only catches fleas in haste.

## *National Proverbs*

A drunkard will awake, a fool never.

The fiddle is judged by its tune.

The diamonds of other countries  
are always the most beautiful.

Let the wolves be satisfied and the  
lambs will be safe.

To-day crowded and to-morrow  
deserted.

## *Russia*

Straw should be kept away from the fire.

Treasure is not always a friend but a friend is always a treasure.

Strength and glory obey the rich.

To ask is no sin, and to be refused no calamity.

Give the devil a candle as well, you never know whom you may please.

## *National Proverbs*

You will never lure an old wolf into the toils.

The dog will not eat his own bone nor allow others to touch it.

Fortune and misfortune dwell in the same courtyard.

A potful of luck is better than a sackful of wisdom.

Do not eat cherries with the *boyards*, they will throw the stones at you.

## *Russia*

A peaceful wolf the calves will lick.

✓ Make peace with men and quarrel  
with your sins.

✓ Go wherever you like and die where  
you must.

The bashful beggar goes away  
hungry.

Make friendship with the wolf, but  
keep your axe ready.



## *National Proverbs*

Lie down with the dogs and you will get up with fleas.

You must get down from your neighbour's horse even in the mud.

If there is no apple one eats a little carrot.

A full belly is deaf to learning.

A thousand friends are few, one enemy is too many.

## *Russia*

Every animal has its own skin.

The calf sometimes catches the wolf.

✓ You cannot buy wisdom abroad, if there is none at home.

A wise companion is half the journey.

He has five Fridays in a week.

## *National Proverbs*

John has one custom and Jack another.

One is wiser in the morning than in the evening.

Every baron has his own fancy.

The pound must make way for the *poor*.

Where the hostess is beautiful, the wine is good.

## *Russia*

It is a stupid mouse that knows only one hole.

The wrath of the Tsar is the forerunner of death.

If you jump over the ditch, you risk breaking your neck.

If you wish to eat the honey in peace, you must kill the bees.

What is the good of honour, if there is nothing to eat.

## *National Proverbs*

Beware of a bull when you are in front of him, of a donkey when you are behind, and of a monk wherever you are.

They are beating *Thomas* for *Eremin's* guilt.

To a beaten dog you need only show a stick.

We are relatives; we have dried our rags in the same sun.

To make a present to the rich is to throw water into the sea.

## *Russia*

Pray to God, but do not offend the devil either.

The big fish swallows the little ones, whole.

A spoonful of tar will spoil a cask of honey.

There will be a holiday in our street too, some day.

A new friend is like a frozen stream in spring.

## *National Proverbs*

One does not ask the bull to have a drink, but to carry the water.

Even a sick wolf will kill a lamb.

The big thieves hang the little thieves.

Everybody loves the tree which gives him shelter.

One woman a market, two a fair.

## *Russia*

Where the devil is powerless he  
sends a woman as his messenger.

If the child does not cry, the mother  
knows not its wants.

The mouth of a wolf and the eyes  
of the priest are never satisfied.

Until the sun will rise, the dew may  
spoil your eyes.

Expensive remedies are always  
useful, if not to the sick at least to  
the chemist.



## *National Proverbs*

One need not sow nor reap fools,  
they grow freely.

When the daughter is married, we  
find many would-be sons-in-law.

The law is like the axle of a carriage,  
you can turn it wherever you please.

Even the thief prays to God, but the  
devil gets hold of his prayers.

He would tear the skin off a flea.

## *Russia*

If you spit in the air, you foul your own beard.

The bird is small, but the beak is sharp.

Where there are seven nurses the baby is blind.

The cat knows whose meat it eats.

The hungry man has only bread on his mind.

## *National Proverbs*

If every one gives a *kopeck*, the poor will have a *rouble*.

He conquers towns with words.

Sin has no master.

You know the falcon by his flight,  
and the brave by his deeds.

He need not search his pockets for words.

## *Russia*

If you care for the guest you must feed his dog too.

The cow may be black, but the milk is white.

A word is not a bird, once flown you can never catch it.

The *moujik* need only prepare the beer and already the devil is here with his pail.

You cannot have the skin twice from the same bull.

## *National Proverbs .*

Necessity teaches the smith to make boots.

Rust destroys iron and grief the heart.

One spark set Moscow on fire.

He is a bad thief who robs his neighbour.

Chickens are counted in the autumn.

## *Russia*

It is the worst wheel that creaks the loudest.

The shovel insults the poker.

That is not life, that's only a carnival.

If you are lucky even your cock will lay eggs.

He would make ropes out of sand.

## *National Proverbs*

You cannot sew buttons on your neighbour's mouth.

Your own rusks taste better than your neighbour's patty.

It is not your business to rock other people's cradles.

The devil met his chum and invited him to his house.

They are teeth, even if they only eat pudding.

## *Russia*

It is not the horse but the oats that draw the cart.

Do not cover your neighbour's roof while your own is leaking.

There are more subterfuges in a woman than turns in the wood.

An oat gruel sings its own praise.

The Tsar is generous, ~~but his~~  
generosity passes ~~through~~ the  
ministerial sieve.



## *National Proverbs*

Seek the brave in prison, and the stupid among the clergy.

Give the naked a piece of cloth, and he will say it is too thick.

Twice the wife is dear to her husband—when he marries her, and when he buries her.

If two dogs are quarrelling, let the third beware.

A good reputation sits still, a bad one runs about.

## *Russia*

To teach a fool is like curing the dead.

He runs seven versts to eat a pudding.

Bury truth in a golden coffin, it will break it open.

A golden hammer will break an iron ceiling.

When the abbot is in the tavern the monks get drunk.

## *National Proverbs.*

Walk fast and you catch misfortune,  
walk slowly and it catches you.

A judge and a stomach, both ask  
without words.

Many ants kill the horse.

Where gold speaketh all is silent.

When the devil grows old, he turns  
monk.

## *Russia*

If a man knew where he would fall,  
he would spread a carpet first.

A judge in court is like a fish in a  
pond.

Calumny is like coals—it either  
burns your hand or makes it dirty.

Love your wife like your soul, and  
shake her like a pear-tree.

The husband's sin remains on the  
threshold—the wife's enters the  
house.

## *National Proverbs*

In stealing from a thief one loses one's time.

Ask not change from the clergy,  
nor remainder from a tailor.

Better a drunken wife than an  
obstinate one.

If you tickle yourself, you can  
laugh when you like.

While saving the egg you may  
sometimes lose the fowl.

## *Russia*

The bear dances and the gipsy takes  
the money.

Not all those marry who make love.

If you have had enough of your  
friend, grant him a loan.

A beautiful cage does not feed the  
bird.

An old horse doesn't trample the  
furrows.









